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Dear Committee Chairs:

Please accept this written testimony on the Freedom of Information Commission budget.

As FOIC Executive Director Colleen Murphy reported to legislative leaders Jan. 2 that, "The loss of support staff has had a highly detrimental impact on the FOIC. . . (which now) simply does not have enough support personnel to handle its internal caseload (approximately 800 appeals annually) and appeals to the Superior, Appellate and Supreme Courts (averaging 30 to 40 annually), causing a backlog of open cases to build.

CCFOI, which has represented the state's citizens and news organizations since 1955, is extremely concerned that a proposed further erosion of FOIC and other state watchdog agencies would imperil their independence.

As you know, the Office of Governmental Accountability's executive administrator has proposed, among other things, that he report directly to the governor rather than to the nine agency heads as the office is now structured. His proposals would reverse the legislature's intent and are an affront to the General Assembly's reasoning in passing this legislation.

The very credibility of the FOIC, the Elections Enforcement Commission, the State Ethics Commission, etc. depends on their independence from a direct link to the chief executive of the state, whoever may hold the office.

We remain concerned how the creation of the OGA has affected the operations of the Freedom of Information Commission. We fully support Ms. Murphy's budget requests.

Thank you.

James H. Smith